

# BeefWatch Health Highlights



The team at GPVEC will be providing a monthly e-newsletter to help keep you informed on what we are working on and discuss timely topics relative to beef production across Nebraska. This first issue will be an informal “Meet and Greet” of the team members.

## Dr. Brian Vander Ley



My name is Brian Vander Ley and I currently serve as a veterinary epidemiologist at the GPVEC. I grew up on a small, diversified farm in South Dakota of which dairy was the focus. I really disliked milking cows most of my childhood, but about the time I finished my second year of high school, I decided I might like to pursue farming as a career. Unfortunately, there was not enough farm for me to join my parents, so I switched gears and decided to pursue a career in veterinary medicine instead. I enrolled in a pre-veterinary medicine program at Dordt College (Sioux Center, Iowa) and took full advantage of the plethora of agricultural opportunities available in one of the most livestock dense counties in the United States. I worked for a small feedlot, milked cows for a local dairy farmer, cared for cattle at Trans Ova Genetics, shadowed veterinarians at a local practice, and even paid for an engagement ring by doing fieldwork for a local farmer.

I applied to veterinary school at Iowa State University and started classes in August of 2004. I knew when I started veterinary school that I wanted to be a 100% dairy practitioner and that graduate degrees were for crazy folks. I held firmly to these two beliefs throughout the first three years of my veterinary education. As I started the fourth year of my veterinary education, I had enrolled in an advanced dairy production medicine elective followed by an entire month of bovine palpation. Some of you reading this know me, so you will appreciate that I do not have the most optimal forearms for conducting pregnancy exams in cows. At the end of a month of preg-checking in dairy cows, I had a black ring bruise around my left forearms and a career crisis on my hands.

I spent the summer of my fourth year of veterinary school participating in small animal electives and then transitioned to several beef cattle focused electives in the fall, and I found my new calling. During

that fall, I spent a month with Dr. Shaun Sweiger, a feedlot consultant based in Oklahoma. Dr. Sweiger introduced me to both cow/calf and feedlot production and I loved it all. Dr. Sweiger also introduced me to practical research in veterinary medicine, which planted a seed that would soon grow.

I returned to ISU to complete my clinical training and started applying for jobs in practice. After several interviews that left my wife and I underwhelmed, I started seriously considering a graduate program at ISU. Soon after, Dr. Sweiger offered me the opportunity to do some research that would involve spending most of my time at the USDA National Animal Disease Center. At the same time, I began a very non-traditional food animal internship to make ends meet. The combination of graduate education and clinical internship turned out to be an incredible opportunity to be a veterinarian while getting a graduate degree.

I graduated from ISU in 2012 with a Ph.D. in Veterinary Microbiology and Preventive Medicine and took a position at the University of Missouri working as a food animal ambulatory clinician and researcher. I split my time between running all over central Missouri teaching students veterinary medicine while working with all animals that were not cats, dogs, or horses and conducting research aimed at reducing respiratory disease issues in cattle. I also had the opportunity to try my hand at managing a very small cow/calf operation in Missouri, from which I learned a lot that veterinary or graduate education did not teach.

In early 2016, a position for a veterinary epidemiologist opened at GPVEC. I really had no plans to leave Missouri, but thanks to the persistence of a couple of Nebraska Veterinarians and the motivation of a particularly rough day at the office, I applied for the position. I am now deeply grateful for the persistence of those two veterinarians and that bad day, because I truly enjoy working at GPVEC. My job here consists of a three-way split between research, extension, and teaching. My major research focus is congestive heart failure in feedlot cattle. I am also involved in projects that impact cattle health and production more broadly, including research efforts designed to produce better cattle genome assemblies and to understand the health implications of alternative cow/calf management systems. Along with the rest of the GPVEC team and our colleagues in Lincoln, I try to keep my ear to the ground for issues that impact veterinarians and producers that would benefit from research effort. My extension effort is generally focused on providing information that can improve the sustainability of cattle production by building resilience into operations. Another major benefit of extension work is having the opportunity to interact with veterinarians and producers to find out what is important and how we at UNL might be able to contribute. Most of my teaching time is dedicated to teaching graduate students, but I also help with elective rotations at GPVEC.

One of the major benefits of moving to rural Nebraska to work at GPVEC was the opportunity for my family and I to move to an acreage near Sutton. My wife, Katie, and I have dreamed of living on a “farmette” for many years, and with the move, we were able to make that dream a reality. Even more important, we are raising our three children, Gerrit, Gavin, and Johanna, in rural Nebraska, an environment that is hard to beat for giving kids a great start on life. My family takes full advantage of the rural life by collecting as many species of animals as possible.

## Dr. Halden Clark



I am originally from a farm east of Greeley, Colorado, where my family raises beef cattle and row crops. I went to school at Colorado State, and I spent my first several years as a veterinarian in a group practice on the Front Range. My role there was mainly working with large Weld County dairy herds. My wife is from eastern South Dakota, and we felt that if we lived between our two families, we would be better able to be a part of the lives of both. When an opportunity arose to work in USDA FSIS, I took it and worked in a fed beef plant in Nebraska for almost two years supervising the inspection

team there. This was an intensive learning experience and has provided me with a deep appreciation of food safety and the processing side of the beef industry. I spent the next three years working at Sutton Veterinary Clinic doing about half cow/calf and half feedlot work. While there, I met Dr. Brian Vander Ley, who also lives in Sutton. I'm now at GPVEC working to get fourth year veterinary students as much hands-on beef cattle experience as possible in each elective rotation we offer. I understand some of the challenges that exist within cattle veterinary practice, but I greatly enjoy this field and am grateful to be able to work with the talented group here at GPVEC/USMARC. I look forward to meeting and working with many of you as well as we work to adapt to the changing pressures at play within the beef industry.

My wife and I have a son and two daughters, ages 10, 7, and 6. I often try to find ways to get them a taste of production agriculture and the kinds of experiences that I treasured as a kid. Last year we bought a group of calves to put on rented cornstalks for the winter, which gave us a chance to have some whole-family fun with cattle. It was an interesting time to start in light of COVID, but we are planning to do it again this year!

## Dr. Erin Jobman



My name is Erin Jobman and I currently serve as a postdoctoral research associate and clinical veterinarian at GPVEC. I grew up in Gothenburg, NE where my family continues to farm and ranch. My family raises white and yellow food-grade corn, in addition to soybeans and alfalfa. We also raise commercial cattle and finish the calves ourselves.

I attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and joined the animal science department after switching from a business major. I began working in the department for a professor that would ultimately mold my career path. Dr. Dan Ciobanu is a molecular geneticist who applies genetic approaches to battle viral diseases in swine. He introduced me to the role research serves in protecting livestock producer success. Experience in a research setting was extraordinary, but

meeting the producers battling the very diseases we were studying was impactful – these producers were families, just like mine. I knew then that this was the rock that I wanted to build my career upon.

After graduating from UNL, I attended veterinary school at Kansas State University. I continued to pursue research opportunities along the way and used my resources to complete a master's in public health. With my interest in research, I knew I did not belong in a clinic forever; however, I felt that the experience gained from private practice would be essential to whatever path my career may take. Following graduation, I accepted a job in a mixed-animal clinic in Central Texas. I chose this clinic because the area was so different from the Platte Valley in which I grew up. Amidst the unruly heat and humidity, the lessons learned were endless. I witnessed firsthand the regional differences in livestock production, land management, and feed resources. Whether it was a cat, or a cow, infectious diseases I had not anticipated managing became routine. I also reached an understanding that Southern cattle are rarely as friendly as the cattle of Jobman Farms.

I left the heart of Texas to experience a career hiccup, from which I eventually returned home to Gothenburg. The veterinarians there graciously welcomed me aboard their team during the spring of 2019. I am forever grateful for the chance to continue clinical practice with an amazing team and help out on the family operation, amidst the relentless floods. But when the opportunity to return to research appeared at GPVEC, I jumped on it.

My responsibilities here include engaging in research projects, training veterinary students, supplying extension outreach to livestock producers and veterinarians, and providing veterinary services to the animals of US-MARC. My primary research focus is congestive heart failure in feedlot cattle through which I will pursue a PhD.

Aside from my new position, I have been cultivating a whole new set of skills necessary to restore an old farmhouse, where I reside with my family.

## Dr. Becky Funk



I am originally from Atkinson, Nebraska where I grew up on a small family operation which was a birth to finish commercial lamb operation. I pursued an undergraduate education at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming before attending veterinary school at Kansas State University, where I also obtained a Master of Science degree concurrently with my DVM.

Following graduation, my husband, Jason, and I moved to Overton, Nebraska where I practiced with Dr. Charles Martin at Fairview Veterinary Clinic for several years. My primary practice interests there were small feedlot and cow-calf clients. In January of 2014, I moved to Rushville, Nebraska to take a practice position with Rushville Veterinary Clinic, practicing there until I joined Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center in January of 2020, accepting the position of Animal Health

Teaching and Extension Specialist.

My role here has both teaching and extension components; therefore, I may often be found spending time with senior vet students as part of the teaching component of my job. I am equally comfortable walking a student through their first c-section or helping them analyze production data in excel. My main teaching focus, however, is in the Feedlot Medicine rotations that we run as many as 6 weeks of the year. Although housed out of the facility here in Clay Center, these feedlot rotations are designed to be an inside look at the feeding industry in Nebraska, so many of our days take us out in the state to look at feeding operations in different regions of Nebraska. If you count among your clients any cattle feeding operations, you may just see us out and about at different times of the year!

Currently, my extension duties entail the coordination of the Beef Quality Assurance Program for Nebraska but will be handing that baton off to the permanent coordinator that has been hired and expected to start next month.

Professionally, I have been a member of both the Academy of Veterinary Consultants and the American Association of Bovine Practitioners since my student days. I have been active in many committees for both, and was honored to be a member of the Program Committee for AABP's inaugural Recent Graduate Conference, I continue to be passionate about working through both of these organizations to help new graduates and young practitioners succeed in practice.

On the personal side, Jason and I share our home with two teenagers. Our daughter, Riley is 14 and a freshman in high school. Cody our son is a newly minted teenager at 13 and is a 7th grader. They are both active in sports and 4-H which keeps us busy following their activities. They both show cattle at a regional and national level so between the herd at home and travel on the road there is no shortage of chores at our house!

## **Dr. Lindsay Waechter-Mead**



My name is Lindsay Waechter-Mead and like all of us, I hold several titles. I am a mixed animal veterinarian by trade, but I hold a great deal of pride being a 4th generation Nebraska cattlegirl, raising the 5th generation of my family on the same soil as the first. Growing up in southcentral Nebraska, I was always going to be a veterinarian. My family farm consisted of row crops, commercial cow/calf operation, farrow to finish hog production and a Suffolk sheep flock. Throw in a few dozen laying hens and too many barn cats and we filled the gamut of diversified agriculture. I saw veterinary medicine as my opportunity to raise my family in the place I had always called home.

My undergraduate time was spent in Lincoln at UNL in the veterinary science program. The most important part of these years was not necessarily in the class work but meeting my husband, Clay. His love for the beef industry was contagious and would play an integral part in my interest in beef cattle medicine.

After spending a year in the UNL Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory as a virology technician, I was accepted into veterinary school at Kansas State. Clay and I started our Red Angus herd by purchasing 3 bred cows and renting space from our friends across Nebraska while we lived in Kansas. I began looking

for job opportunities during my fourth year of veterinary school and the search kept taking me back to south central Nebraska. I was fortunate to find a patient veterinary mentor at Platte Valley Vet where I fell in love with rural veterinary lifestyle. Helping diversified clients maintain their livelihood made me proud to be a veterinarian.

Our first daughter was born after a few years of practice and I suddenly realized there was no such thing as a “balanced” lifestyle. An opportunity presented at the Animal Clinic in Hastings which served two purposes – it moved me closer to my family farm and it spread out my emergency duties with multiple doctors. I was able to hone my skills as a mixed animal vet as well as experience clinic ownership in a large practice. After two more babies, a move to my family farm and a leap of faith, I accepted the position of Clinical Veterinarian at Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center.

My duties at GPVEC include teaching veterinary students production medicine and reaching out to Nebraska veterinarians and producers through extension programming. My veterinary interests center around cow/calf health and preventative medicine, specifically how environment affects calf immunity. I am passionate about rural agriculture and what our profession can do to positively influence rural communities to ensure that generations can continue to enjoy the life that I love.

My family time is centered around our three children: Anna, Harrison and Norah. We spend our days on our family farm southwest of Blue Hill, raising Red Angus cattle and following our kids to their many activities. You will usually find us cheering from the sidelines of the football field and the show ring.